



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Situation in Northern Kosovo

As delivered by Political Counselor Christopher Robinson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna,
September 22, 2011

The United States reiterates the position that we expressed during last week's meeting of the Permanent Council and at the United Nations: We welcome the reopening of the border crossing points between Kosovo and Serbia and the implementation of the EU-facilitated customs stamp arrangement. We note that these actions took place in close coordination with the international community, including the European Union's Rule of Law Mission, EULEX, and NATO's KFOR mission.

Kosovo is a sovereign country. The presence of Kosovo customs officers at its border crossing points is fully in accordance with international law. Kosovo customs officers are currently present at other Gates along the Kosovo border, including with Serbia. The presence of Kosovo customs officers, alongside EULEX officers, at the northern border crossing points reflects normal customs procedures for international border crossings.

We commend the efforts of KFOR and EULEX to ensure a safe and secure environment and to enable the free movement of both goods and people in both directions over the Kosovo-Serbia border. The free movement of people and goods is in Kosovo's and Serbia's interests -- and in keeping with each country's EU aspirations. We note that the flow of goods and people through the two northern gates is being blocked by Serbs north of the border and Kosovo Serbs in northern Kosovo, not Kosovo or international community officials. Roadblocks and barricades only serve to impair the daily lives of the people of Kosovo and Serbia and to inhibit their freedom of movement.

The United States has serious concerns about the inflammatory rhetoric which could have the effect of provoking and condoning renewed violence in Kosovo. Inflammatory rhetoric could threaten international personnel on the ground and prevent them from fulfilling their missions' mandates. We -- as should all the participating States -- find unacceptable any interference with the work of the international missions in Kosovo.

We call on all actors and participating States engaged in Kosovo affairs to use their influence to bring to an end the inflammatory rhetoric that heightens tensions and undermines our peacemaking and state-building activities in Kosovo. The United States continues to strongly back the EU's work on the facilitated Dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, whose next session is September 27-28. We urge both parties to demonstrate flexibility and a willingness to compromise, and to focus on building on the significant progress made to date in that dialogue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.